

Hypnosis #6: The Known

by Ctarsis

Category: Animorphs
Language: English
Status: In-Progress
Published: 1999-12-29 09:00:00
Updated: 1999-12-29 09:00:00
Packaged: 2016-04-27 12:26:25
Rating: K
Chapters: 1
Words: 15,239
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: Jake and Cassie may be marked by the Yeerks because Ax freaked out around cinnamon buns...

Hypnosis #6: The Known

* * *

>Chapter One -- Xilite<hr>**

"I still can't believe I let you talk me into this," I complained.

"Admit it, it's fun," Rachel said, practically dragging me into The Gap.

"But it's...it's..._human_."

I had to admit that I did enjoy being able to talk to Rachel as a friend. I'd been enemies with the Animorphs for a long time. They'd finally found out what I was -- it's kind of hard to ignore when you're staring at a creature that is definitely not human on a planet that is definitely not Earth -- and I was beginning to accept the fact that they could be my friends.

Rachel laughed. "Yeah. Human entertainment."

I looked around and immediately spotted a leopard outfit. "Ooh, ooh, ooh!! Look at that!"

"Cool!" Rachel rushed over. "It is _so_ you!"

The smile faded for a moment. Yes, it was "me." It looked a lot like my Xaralite skin. Fur.

I sighed. "Yeah."

Rachel saw my face. "Xilite, what's wrong?"

"Nothing, Rachel," I said, steeling my expression. I laughed. "Just depressed over the price."

"You haven't even looked yet," she said flatly.

I flipped the tag over. "Urgh. Okay, now I'm depressed over the price."

Rachel sighed. "Don't you, like, have any money?"

"Not really. Man. Maybe I'll go get a job somewhere. Morph a 17-year-old. I'm not just going to go steal it."

I was aware that I talked like a human. I'd been a human for around four years. I had stopped fighting it around humans. I was just worried that I was more of a human now than a Xaralite.

Of course, I was the only Xaralite still free, still conscious.

"Let's go down to the food court," Rachel suggested. "Get a burger or fries or something."

"Fries and a milkshake," I said automatically. I smiled sweetly. "Are you volunteering to pay?"

She laughed. "Sure."

* * *

><p> As we approached the food court, I heard screams.<p>

"Oh, noooooo," Rachel moaned. "I know those --"

"CINNAMON BUNZ!!! BUNZZZZZ-UH!!!!!!"

Rachel and I burst out laughing. It felt good. I was still trying to get my mind off the other Xaralites.

"That's Ax, all right," she said.

"I wonder who he's with?" I shot her a playful glance. "Maybe Tobias?"

She grinned. "Maybe."

I crossed my arms. "You know, I've never had a cinnamon bun. I wonder if they're as good as he thinks they are."

Suddenly I heard a new voice. The manager, probably.

"GET THAT DERANGED LUNATIC OUT OF MY FOOD COURT!"

Then I heard another voice. Another manager...?

"YOUR FOOD COURT?!?!?! HE'S DESTROYING **MY** FOOD COURT!! MINE!!"

"CINNAMON BUN-ZUH!!!!!!!!!"

I was laughing so hard I could barely breathe. I'd never let myself go like this. I'd never really let myself enjoy human culture.

I believe this is the aspect they refer to as "comedy."

I looked around. "Yeah, Tobias is here. I think he's the one over there pretending that he doesn't know Ax." "That's Marco," she corrected. "Tobias is the one trying to pull him off the counter."

"And Jake and Cassie would be the ones trying not to laugh, talking to the other manager?"

"The manager spattered with soda? Yeah, I guess so," Rachel said, squinting. "What is this? All the Animorphs except us are here? Why weren't we invited?"

"Excuse me? We've been at the mall for the past two hours!"

"CINNAMON BUNZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ-UH!!!!!!!!!"

Cassie and Jake couldn't take it anymore. They started laughing.

The manager looked outraged. "DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH HE'S EATEN?!?!?! I WILL BE PAID!"

"Okay, big question," Rachel managed through her laughter. "Do we go and order like we're normal people, or do we try and pull Ax out of the cinnamon bunzzzzzzz-uh place?"

I shrugged. I was gaining control of my laughter quickly. "You go order. I'll go try and save the managers from Ax."

She walked over to some fast food place. I didn't see. I was running toward the manager who was beet red and extremely upset.

"GET THIS LUNATIC OUT OF --"

My eyes glowed.

He hesitated, then kind of sagged. Tobias looked up.

"Hi," he said, as if nothing was happening.

"Rachel's ordering over there," I said, pointing. I smiled. "I'll take care of Ax."

I grabbed Ax's arm and pulled him away from a carton of cinnamon buns. His head snapped around.

"Hi," I said calmly.

"Hewwoo," he said through a mouthful of cinnamon bun.

"Umm...can we leave now?"

"I wust weworwf. Iwhhu iwuu weffikhi kwof weo --"

Translation: You must demorph. It is...getting?...close to the two hour time limit, I said, switching to Xaralite telepathy.

[Yes,] he said, switching to Andalite thought speak. Amazingly, he started to walk away from the cinnamon buns. [I believe that I am still not fully in control of my human morph.]

Took me a while, I responded. He smiled, then left to go to the men's room and demorph. Needless to say, I didn't go.

I sat down with the other Animorphs. They were staring at me.

"Whaaaaaat?" I said defensively.

"You got him away from cinnamon buns," Tobias said blankly.

I almost blushed. I caught myself in time. "Oh. Umm...he had to demorph."

"Oh."

"Rachel, did you get any salt for the fries?"

"Yeah," she responded, tossing me a few of the cute little human packet things. "Here."

"Thanks." I inserted the straw in the hole in the plastic lid of the styrofoam cup. "So, what are you all doing here?"

"Us?" Marco laughed. "What are you two doing here?"

I rolled my eyes. "Rachel dragged me here. And yes, I did enjoy it."

Rachel grinned. "I knew you would."

Ax was coming back out. He'd changed morphs from his strangely-pretty-yet-handsome morph to a new one I hadn't seen before. A morph that the human part of me registered as "cute."

Sandy blond hair, dark brown eyes. Very, very cute. Even taller than me.

He sat down in the only available seat: across from me, beside Tobias.

The seven of us were hanging out together. Breach of the #1 Animorphs rule: Don't act like a group. Oh well. It was a freak coincidence that we'd met up, and it wouldn't hurt to hang out for a moment or two.

I stared at the manager of the Cinnabon place. He was running around trying to find the kid who'd eaten his cinnamon buns.

I leaned over to speak to Ax. "Good thing you morphed. The manager's looking for you everywhere."

"Yes," he agreed, still staring at the cinnamon buns on the shelves.
"Cinnamon buns-zuh."

"Hey, didn't they used to have some other manager?" Marco asked.

"Yes," I said. "The manager they have now is a Controller. A high-ranking Controller. Most of the people working for him are Controllers as well." I smiled at their incredulous faces. "I posed as a Controller for a while. Got all the latest news."

"Then there's probably another reason he's running around screaming for the dude who ate his buns-zuh...buns," Marco said. "Maybe he knows it's an Andalite."

Rachel shrugged. "Maybe."

I looked back at Ax. That morph was definitely cute.

Not that I was noticing or anything.

* * *

>Chapter Two -- Rachel<hr>**

I watched the manager rave about Ax. "Well, Ax has achieved public fame," I commented. "Everyone in the food court has heard of him."

"The way that guy's screaming, I'd bet every one in the mall has heard of him," Cassie laughed.

"Cinnamon bunz-uh. Buns-zzzzzzzuuuuh."

"Ax, please don't start that," Xilite moaned.

"Don't bother," Marco said. "He can't help it."

"So. What _are_ you five doing here?" I asked.

Tobias shrugged. "Ax wanted cinnamon buns. I wanted food other than mouse. We ran into Cassie and Jake and Marco when we got here."

"Cassie and Jake?" I said, winking at Cassie.

"And me!" Marco protested. "Don't forget darling, lovable me!"

Xilite turned green.

"You have to teach me to do that," I commented.

"It's easy. Focus on a picture of something really disgusting, like short people," she said, grinning. "No offense, Cassie."

"None taken."

Xilite toyed with her french fries. "I wonder about that manager," she murmured, casting him another glance.

"What?" Jake said, instantly alert.

"He's a Controller. What if he's figured out what Ax is?" Xilite replied.

"Doesn't matter," Cassie said. "He's morphed."

"Yeah, well, he saw Tobias hanging out with him. And he saw Cassie and Jake explaining Ax's behavior to the other manager. It doesn't affect Tobias that much, since he's just morphed as well, but it does affect Cassie and Jake."

I looked up again. "Yeah. And is it my imagination, or is he staring over here a lot?"

Marco looked tense. "Should we leave?"

The manager's eyes locked on Jake, then traveled to Cassie, back and forth.

"Not now," Jake said calmly. "He stares at us, then we leave? Too suspicious."

"We should leave one by one, or something," I said tersely.

"Yeah. Rachel, Xilite? You came in together. Leave first."

Xilite laughed. "Fine. We'll wait for you in the bookstore. I'll see how many errors I can spot in one science book."

"Ha, ha, ha," Marco commented drily. Then he brightened. "Hey, if our science is incorrect, and I'm flunking it, maybe I'm actually a genius!"

"Maybe not," I replied. "Come on, Cat -- Xilite."

Xilite stood up. "Bye, everyone." She hesitated. "I could erase his memory --"

"No," Jake said. "Move."

She raised an eyebrow. I knew that Xilite had been a leader among her people. She didn't deal well with other leaders.

Just the same, she turned and walked toward the bookstore. I followed.

The manager kept staring at our table.

Straight at Cassie and Jake.

* * *

>Chapter Three -- Cassie<hr>**

I didn't like this. Not at all.

"Tobias, Ax. Wait a few moments, then head towards the bookstore as well. And Ax? Don't stop at Cinnabon."

"Yes, Prince Jake."

"Don't call me prince."

"Yes, Prince Jake."

Jake smiled quickly, then turned his serious expression back on Marco. "Marco, go with them."

They left. Leaving us alone.

"So, what do we do?" I demanded.

"Wait a while, then casually leave in the other direction, turn around, and meet up with the others at the bookstore."

"Uh-oh," I gasped. The manager was heading straight for us!

"You with the kid who was eating my stuff?" he asked roughly.

"Um, no, he's just a friend," Jake managed. He forced a smile. "He...loves your stuff. Really. A big fan."

"Uh-huh. Well, I need to be paid. And he left pretty quick. So come with me."

My eyes went wide. This was not good.

"Sorry, our folks are waiting for us," I said, trying to sound casual.

"They'll just have to keep waiting," he said with a fake smile.

"Look, we could just pay you," Jake offered, pulling out his wallet. "Rita's right, we really have to go."

Rita? Who was Rita?

Oh. Duh. He didn't want to tell the guy our real names.

"I want your friend's number," he said. "Need to contact his parents about his irresponsible behavior."

"He...he's staying with us for a few days," I stammered. "His parents aren't from around here."

Yeah, they only live a few light-years away, I thought drily.

"Staying with you?" he raised an eyebrow. "Really? Well, then, I need your numbers."

I shot Jake a panicked look. He kind of smiled and nodded. "I'll

bring him by tomorrow," he said evasively.

"No, I want your phone numbers," he growled.

"Our parents --"

He leaned close to Jake and whispered a single word.

I could guess what it was.

"Sorry, I didn't hear you," Jake said calmly.

"Andalite," he said louder.

"What's an Andalite?"

"I think you know."

The look in his eyes was terrible. We were trapped, we couldn't morph --

"Hey! What's up?"

I looked in the direction of the voices. So did the manager.

Get lost!

The telepathic voice in my head could only be Xilite's. Jake and I slipped away and turned sharply around the corner, out of the food court.

I looked back at Xilite and Tobias and Ax. Xilite was morphed halfway into a Frolis of me and Rachel, still retaining her eyes.

Marco and Rachel motioned to us from a nearby store. We sauntered over.

"That was close," Jake said calmly.

"Xilite's going to take care of him," Marco announced. "Come on. Let's go."

* * *

>Chapter Four -- Tobias<hr>**

Xilite blinked. "Where did they go?" she asked innocently.

The manager looked back and growled. "Where _did_ they go, little girl?!"

She stared at him. "Little?"

I glared at Ax, willing him to be silent. If he started playing with mouth-sounds...

"Are you saying that I am short?"

He looked distracted. That was good. I could see Jake and Cassie disappearing around a corner and Marco making the "OK" sign.

Now all we had to do was get out of here.

[Xilite, erase his --] I started to say in thought-speak.

Like she'd have listened.

Oh, man! she moaned. _I'm too far morphed!_

[What?!] Ax demanded.

My **xilinni** power won't work! I morphed too much and that part of my brain doesn't exist in this pitiful body!

[So we make like normal people and run?] I suggested.

"Um, we have to go," I said coolly. "Gotta go find our friends."

"I don't think so, you little --"

Xilite slugged him in the face. He staggered back.

"Call me short again and I'll give you more!" she said like everything else was normal.

"Perhaps we should depart," Ax said, grabbing her arm.

He hadn't played with mouth-sounds! I was massively relieved.

"Hey, get back here!" he yelled as we started to run.

Not a chance, I thought as we bolted. _I don't feel like getting a slug stuck in my ear._

"SECURITY!!"

"What?! All he did was eat a few cinnamon buns!" I raged.

"A few?!" Xilite demanded. "There were like three empty cartons on the floor!"

"They were extremely delicious," he said defensively.

We slid down the aisle and practically ran into the others.

"He's calling security!" Xilite warned. "Let's go!"

"I thought you were going to --"

"We'll explain later," I said. "Now come on!"

Yeah, we'd make it out of the mall. I didn't doubt that.

I just wondered if Jake and Cassie were now marked.

Marked by the Yeerks.

This was bad.

* * *

>Chapter Five -- Xilite<hr>**

I hesitated after the others left. I knew that Tobias and Ax were still in the mall somewhere, but everyone else was gone.

I sank onto a bench just outside the mall. What was wrong with me? How could I have overlooked the fact that my morph was impaired in the _xilinni_ power?

Now, Jake and Cassie were marked. My fault.

I slowly demorphed. Just a gradual lightening of the tones of my skin. I could feel the fact that my power hadn't returned, and yet I was once again me. Outwardly. My eyes weren't right yet. I still had a little ways to go.

My eyes were gradually becoming more green as I demorphed. I realized that they had been blue-ish green.

"Hey, baby."

I looked up to stare into the face of a fifteen or twenty year old guy.

I felt a slight edge of fear from the human inside me.

"What do you want?" I snapped with all the arrogance that I had possessed (and still did).

"Nothing, darlin'. Want me to go buy you a shake?"

I almost punched him in the face. I didn't need this. Not now.

"Thanks but no thanks," I said, standing up. "I don't feel like going back inside."

He caught my arm and put his other arm around my waist.

Now I felt more than a little fear from the human inside. I couldn't use my _xilinni_ power. I couldn't morph.

"You sure about that?" he whispered in my ear.

I whirled around and punched him in the face. "Get away from me," I spat.

He moved to grab my arm again as I walked away. I moved faster.

He followed.

Not good, not fun.

I had slung my purse over my shoulder and it was bouncing behind me. He grabbed it and just about pulled it away.

"What part of, 'I don't need a shake,' don't you understand?!" I practically roared.

"I don't think you know who you're turning down," he purred. "A lot of girls would die for me --"

"Yeah, and I'm not one of them," I shot back.

"Come on, sweetheart."

He grabbed my arm again. I was getting really sick of this really fast.

I saw someone coming up behind him. Someone blond.

"I suggest that you retreat," Ax said calmly.

"Yeah, man," he said nervously. "I didn't mean anything by it!"

The creep shot out of there.

"Thank you," I said very calmly. I demorphed the rest of the way, grateful to regain my eyes. I wondered why I hadn't demorphed before.

"Tobias already left," he informed me. "It was close to the two hour time limit. I had already demorphed so it was not a problem for me."

He wasn't playing with mouth-sounds. Amazing.

I realized that we were walking towards a small, shady grove of trees. Perfect place to morph to birds.

"Thanks again," I said with a little shiver. "I don't know what was wrong with me. I should have had enough sense to demorph all the way."

"Fear is sometimes petrifying."

I didn't like that image of myself. Not at all. I didn't like the fact that I'd been scared.

He was just a human. That was all. So why was I afraid?

I was at a loss for words. A loss for a reply. I didn't want to answer that. What could I say? "Nah, I wasn't scared"? "Oh, yeah, I was like so terrified"?

I didn't say anything.

"I think the others will meet us at the barn," he said finally. "We should morph."

I nodded. "Yeah. We can morph here. It's pretty much out of sight."

I began to morph my northern harrier. Ax had the same morph, as I soon discovered.

[This is a fascinating morph,] I said calmly. [The only other flying animals I have done are insects and the bat.]

[Flying is a wonderful sensation,] he agreed. He turned his harrier eyes on me. [Wonderful.]

I blinked, scared now by my own emotions. I looked down, spotting Cassie's barn.

[There,] we said at the same time. I was reminded of the time we'd done the same back on...the other planet. I still didn't know the name of it.

We landed and began to demorph. I wished that the flight had lasted a little bit longer.

For more reasons than one.

We stepped inside. I blinked again as my Xaralite eyes adjusted to the light.

They were there, waiting.

"Took you long enough," Marco said harshly.

"I was...held up...at the mall," I said evasively.

"Yeah, whatever. Ax, let me guess: You alerted another manager at the Cinnabon?" he practically spat.

[Actually, no.]

"We have larger problems," Rachel said impatiently. "Jake could have Tom waiting for him with Visser Three and Hork-Bajir when he gets home, and why? Because Ax couldn't control himself at the food court."

"Yeah, Ax, nice going," Marco snorted.

[I...I am sorry,] he said, embarrassed.

"That's really going to help us now --"

"Marco, that's enough," Jake said warningly.

Marco shut up. Rachel didn't.

"He's right," she complained. "Just because --"

"Rachel," Cassie said softly.

"-- Ax couldn't take --"

"Rachel," Jake reproved.

"-- the sense of taste --"

"Rachel!" I exploded.

That at least shocked her. She closed her mouth.

[The point isn't what happened. It's what we do about it,] Tobias said emotionlessly.

"I can erase his memory of it," I said with a shrug.

"If you had the sense to control your morph we wouldn't have this problem!" Marco ranted.

"I have my powers now," I said threateningly.

His mouth snapped shut.

"Who knows how many people the manager's told by now?" Rachel snorted.

[We don't,] Tobias agreed. [That's the problem.]

"We still have that whole PTA thing, as well," Marco reminded us. "When do we get a day off?"

Cassie shrugged. "So what do we do?"

"We find out who the manager's told and erase their memories too," I said with an impatient shrug. "Easy enough."

Or so I thought.

* * *

>Chapter Six -- Jake<hr>**

I didn't go back to the food court for a few days, needless to say. Then it was Monday.

Time to face Assistant Principal Chapman.

I dozed off in algebra class for the three thousandth time. Nora -- the teacher, as well as Marco's stepmom -- told me that if I did that one more time in her classes, she'd send me to Chapman.

The last time.

As a result, I ended up sitting nervously in Chapman's office.

"Jake, Mrs. _____ --" Marco's last name "-- says this isn't the first time. In fact, the words she used were, 'He sleeps through at least three math classes a week.' "

"Two, actually," I squeaked.

"Excuse me?"

"I only sleep through two," I defended myself.

He looked at me through his glasses and smoothed back what would have

been his hair if he wasn't balding.

I started to fidget.

"Jake, I think you have some problems in your life."

"Gee, I wonder," I thought sarcastically.

"All teenagers do," I said evasively.

He looked displeased. "You don't all have to have problems," he insisted.

"It's part of being a teenager. I have less than most," I lied.

"Yeah, I don't have to worry about peer pressure. After all, I'm too busy worrying about the fate of the stupid universe!"

"I think I know of an organization that could help you."

I thought fast. Only one way to play it. The independent teenager. That was the only possible way to get me out of this!

"Look, I don't need help with my problems," I said harshly. "I can handle them myself without any stupid organizations!"

He looked shocked. He hadn't expected it.

This was not like me. Not really. Like Marco, maybe, but not me.

"Can I go now?" I demanded beligerantly.

"Uh...Jake, I do want to tell you about..." He looked very confused at my face. He finally shrugged. "Yes. But I may need to talk to your par--"

I walked out when he said yes. I was shaking.

The bell rang to change classes. I met up with Marco.

"How'd it go?" he said impatiently.

"Fine," I said vaguely.

He looked suspicious.

"No, I haven't been infested," I said, keeping my voice down. "Chapman just tried to introduce me to the Sharing concept, I told him I didn't need any help with my problems and he let me leave."

"Problems? That was dumb, Jake. Let him know you have problems."

I hesitated. "I told him all teenagers have them. And that I have less than most. Maybe he bought it, maybe not."

We split up into our separate classes.

* * *

>Chapter Seven -- Xilite<hr>**

Ax and I went to the food court when the others were in school. I had a mission, and I needed backup.

Okay, so the last part isn't true. I never need backup. I never want backup.

_Right. That's why you freaked out because of some human yesterday, a sneering voice told me.

I pushed it away. That was just an accident. I didn't have time to get control of my emotions.

It didn't change the fact that I _had_ freaked out.

I _didn't_ need backup, anyway. I just invited him to go snag a cinnamon bun or something.

I had mowed someone's lawn and gotten a little money. Two lawns, actually. That got me a little more.

Not enough to buy that leopard outfit. I sighed. I had liked it.

Definitely enough to buy some food. And I was starving.

The manager spotted me and squinted. I wasn't morphed. I looked the same as I had when I'd walked in with Rachel.

He looked like he vaguely recognized me. I nodded and smiled and walked over to get a cinnamon bun.

Ax? Do. Not. Go. Nuts. Please.

[Cinnamon buns!] he commented in thought-speak.

Maybe this was a mistake.

I leaned up on the counter and opened my leopard-print purse. "I'd like two cinnamon bunz-uh...buns...please."

He looked up to meet my eyes. Major mistake.

My eyes glowed.

_I am so much more powerful than you, I announced. _Did you tell anyone, human?_

I could see that he had. Chapman. Other Controllers.

Forget, human. Forget.

He shook his head, looking as though he'd risen from a dream. "I'm sorry, what did you want again?"

"Two cinnamon buns," I said coolly. "Please."

* * *

><p> We sat down and ate the cinnamon buns. Dumb, when I think about it. But Ax did manage to control himself.<p>

I passed by The Gap again, looking for the outfit. It was still there. I walked in briefly.

It had been marked down a little. I sighed. Not enough.

We flew back to the barn.

* * *

>Chapter Eight -- Marco<hr>**

"Told who?" I demanded.

"Chapman. Some other, not as well known Controllers."

"Who probably spread the word," Rachel muttered.

"How bad can it be?" Cassie argued. "I mean, really, all we did was try to explain to another manager. And they don't even know that Ax is an Andalite."

"They won't take any chances," I shot back. "And, thinking that Cassie and Jake are just normal humans -- only using them to find the other kid -- they'll end up infesting two of the supposed Andalite bandits. If they do. _We're_ not taking any chances either."

Cassie sighed. "What are we supposed to do about it, anyway?"

Xilite shrugged. "Get to Chapman."

"Right. What about the others?" I said sarcastically. "You and Ax really make a great team, Xilite. He messes Cassie and Jake up and you're too stupid to fix it."

"Marco, I am getting really sick of this really fast," she said calmly.

"I don't care," I snorted. "You need someone to tell you the truth who's not scared of your power."

She raised an eyebrow.

I'd rather have had her blow up and start hypnotizing me. That would prove that I'd gotten to her, that my words had hit home. But she only maintained a calm expression, raised an eyebrow. Like I was nothing to her. Like my words were nothing to her. Too foolish to bother with.

She wanted me to know that.

And I did.

It was a face-off. Neither of us would back down. She because...because she was Xilite. I felt helpless for a moment. With all that she had done, with all that she was, how could I stand against her...?

But she's not invincible, I told myself. _Never invincible._

I returned her piercing glare. Fire boiled up behind it.

Her eyes glowed ever so slightly.

I looked away, unwilling to look at her power.

She had beaten me in the silent battle.

Her meaning was clear. _You're nothing to me. Your human willpower nothing to mine._

You are nothing to me.

* * *

>Chapter Nine -- Rachel<hr>**

We got nothing established during the meeting except the fact that Xilite would go to school with me Tuesday as a visitor. Erase Chapman's memories.

She was thrilled with the idea.

Yeah, Yeerks, I'm here. I'm here to fight you. You could fight me back on my world, but not now.

She displayed this message in every form of her body language.

The next day -- Tuesday -- she did. She hung out with me and Cassie, I introduced her to everyone, et cetera et cetera. My classmates seemed half scared, half fascinated. Those had been my emotions at first, too.

All went fine until she spotted Cairo in the hall.

She froze.

Then she tossed her long hair back over her shoulder and crossed her arms.

Cairo saw her. Her face lit up in a grin. "Cat!" she exclaimed, racing over.

Xilite spun away and growled. "Get away from me, Yeerk."

Get out of here, Rachel.

I slid out of sight. I couldn't do anything. Not now.

But I watched.

"What brings you here, sister?" Cairo purred.

"Interests opposite yours," she said calmly.

"Really? Why, Cat, I'm surprised at you. We were so close."

"Yeah, we were. Before you were infested."

"But she's still in this body, you know," the Yeerk said softly, moving closer. "Don't you have anything you want to tell her?"

"I have nothing to do with you, Yeerk."

"Nothing to tell your sister?"

Xilite's face went from calm and cool to wild. She grabbed Cairo's wrist in a grip that I guessed was strong, judging by Cairo's face.

"Yeah, actually, I do," she growled. "Fight, Cairo. Fight it always. And I'll be back."

Her eyes glowed.

Couldn't leave the Yeerk with memory of her. Or Cairo, for that matter.

Cairo walked away in a dreamlike haze.

I imagined how I'd feel if it was Jordan or Sarah. Probably about the same.

I put my hand on her shoulder. "You will be back," I told her. "Back for her. And for your people."

She shuddered as though she'd been slapped. Then it was gone, that arrogant expression back on her face. "Of course, Rachel," she said coolly. "I'm going to go find Chapman. I think you have a class to get to."

"Yeah," I answered. "Sure you can handle it by yourself?"

A half-sneer, half-smile appeared on her face. "I suspect that I can."

I turned to go into my classroom.

* * *

>Chapter Ten -- Xilite<hr>**

Yeah. I'd failed Cairo, failed my people. And because of that, both had lost control of themselves. Cairo, a Yeerk slave. My people, immobile in _celaai_ tubes. And I, free.

I felt like dirt. I'd failed. My worst nightmare.

Most Xaralites can get past failure. But then, most Xaralites don't doom the entire race.

I held the record there.

I was used to succeeding. I'd achieved the rank of scientist, captain of a ship, captain of a fleet. I'd been exceptional in even Xaralite terms of intelligence. I had become a captain of a _fleet_ -- the first female ever to achieve that.

And where was that fleet now?

But then, Thchi, Ellimist, and Crayak had been involved. Not my fault.

Yes, it was. I should have outsmarted them. I should have beaten them. My fleet should have gotten past it.

Define "arrogance": Xilite.

With my ranks and my intelligence had come the belief that I was invincible.

I still weighed the odds, I still scoped the situation, but without fear. I wasn't a reckless captain. In battle, yes. When planning battles, no. I had still been responsible.

But I'd also been arrogant.

Too arrogant.

Not my problem now, I tried to tell myself. _My problem now is finding Chapman._

But no...this would always be my problem.

His office. I remembered the path there. After all, when I'd first started posing as Cairo's sister -- before I moved out, before she was taken -- I'd gone to this school merely because I'd been forced to. I couldn't say "No way" to my parents without attracting attention I didn't want.

Not even Cairo had known what I was.

I opened the door and closed it behind me.

Chapman looked up, annoyed by this student who assumed that she had leave to enter.

"Hello, Iniss two-two-six," I said calmly.

"Cairo?" he said, confused.

I leaned forward on his desk. "Cat. Not Cairo."

Before he had time to react, my eyes were glowing.

Forget, human. Forget.

Good, he hadn't reported to Visser Three yet. I slowly backed out of

the office.

He shook his head as my eyes stopped glowing. By that time, I was gone.

* * *

>Chapter Eleven -- Cassie<hr>**

Xilite met up with us at lunch.

"How did it go?" I asked.

"He didn't report to Visser Three or mention it to anyone else. I'm guessing that he planned to do something about it today," she responded. "And it went fine."

She looked saddened. Memories, I guessed.

"Who were some of the other Controllers he told?" I asked.

"Some stupid morons who we can just take out," she said with a shrug.

"We don't do that," I shot back. "We don't just take out humans."

"Yeah, because they're your people. Not mine. You take out Hork-Bajir without thinking of their people. You'd take out a Xaralite if you had to. Why not just take out a stupid human?"

I was taken aback. "Because...because they aren't a part of this war, we're fighting for them --"

"Neither are the Hork-Bajir."

I drew a blank in the way of a response.

"Sooo," Rachel said, breaking the uncomfortable silence.

"Umm...uhh...what are we doing about the...uh...PTA thing?"

Xilite shrugged. "Something."

She was colder than she had been in a while. I struggled to figure out what could, if not break this wall, at least find a way around it.

"Perhaps there will be a battle," I said finally.

It did the trick. Her eyes started to flame.

"Battle with the Yeerks," she said, calm despite the fire in her eyes. "A battle to determine the fate of some human adults, not important at all. Just a silly human oh-I-can't-let-any-of-my-own-be-infested idea. You're all so naive. You fight the small battles that will not help at all when you could be attacking, on the offensive. You wait until they start a war, then you play defense, never gaining anything. All you can hope to do is

annoy the Yeerks until they're so annoyed that they leave, when you could be chasing them away."

That wasn't what I hoped she would say.

Rachel looked hesitant. "The humans are --"

"Oh, I know, I know, Rachel," Xilite said, pulling her lips back to reveal shining white teeth. "The humans are who we are fighting for, hmm? And the humans who could be infested take priority over all else? How do you hope to win a war that way?" Her eyes were smoldering now. "How do you hope to defeat the Yeerks -- if you never _try_?"

"We...we do try," I said lamely.

"Defense, Cassie, that's all you are. Defense. And one day, your defense will lose. You think you're that...invincible? That you can take out so many Hork-Bajir in a battle and never be taken out yourself? Think about it! What are the odds that one Earth animal can take out ten, twenty Hork-Bajir in a battle and never be killed itself? You'll die having accomplished nothing!"

She laughed a hissing laugh. "Accomplishing nothing...except your own defeat."

Xilite stood up and walked out. "My mission, however, is accomplished," she said as she left. "I have no reason to remain."

* * *

>Chapter Twelve -- Xilite<hr>**

I was flying. Flying, so high above the trees, letting the wind lift me up, letting myself go faster, faster, riding the thermals --

-- and feeling so incomplete.

Incomplete because I had nothing.

Nothing except my warrior's thoughts, my captain's logic, my lust for vengeance. And it was destroying me.

Destroying me.

But I could not release my vengeance. Never!

Did I want to?

My people! Gone! Captured!

Defeated...

[Xilite?]

I was grateful for the voice. I looked around until I spotted another bird-of-prey. Another northern harrier.

[Ax,] I said. I swooped closer. [What's up?]

Human phrases! Was I human, now?

My life -- so complicated. My identity -- worse.

[The thermals are excellent,] he answered. [Do you have a specific destination?]

[No,] I replied. [Not really.]

[How did it go with Chapman?]

[He hasn't reported to Visser Three, and it went fine.] I scanned the horizon.

Blue sky! Blue sky, eternally! White clouds floated through the air. Green treetops dotted the terrain below.

Ocean! Beautiful ocean!

Do you know what Xilite means (in the Xaralite language)? "Child of the ocean."

No, it's not because Xaralites believe in spontaneous generation/evolution. Science has proved both theories wrong. Just because more primitive races -- Andalites, Yeerks, humans -- believe it doesn't mean the more intelligent Xaralites do.

It's because the ocean is a symbol of power to us. The roaring waves that fill Earth also fill -- filled, I should say -- Xarila. We had more of a greenish tint to ours, but it was still blue. And it was still powerful, loud, breaking on shores not so different from Earth's.

Xilite has four meanings. "Child of the ocean" is my favorite.

"Child of the ocean" has implicated meanings. One of them is "power." One is "courage." Another is "strength." Yet another -- "fearless." And my favorite -- now this is ironic -- "arrogance."

The ocean gave me strength. It always had.

Even on Xarila, when I had doubts, fears, they had evaporated when I walked along the shore. It had given me strength then and it gave me strength now. I could confide in it.

Yeah, it's ridiculous. But I felt as though I could tell the ocean anything and it would understand.

Its stormy depths beckoned to me. I laughed, all sad thoughts vanishing. I wasn't afraid of it. I would never be afraid of such a friend.

[Ax, do you have any water morphs?]

[Several,] he replied, puzzled.

[Care to try them out?]

* * *

><p> I had acquired several water morphs. Tiger shark and killer whale, predatory morphs. Blue whale and dolphin, for fun only. Great squid, because of how deep it could dive.<p>

Or maybe I just wanted as many water morphs as possible. I loved the ocean.

I was using my killer whale now. So was Ax.

[I love this!] I exclaimed. [Love this love this love this love this!!!!]

[More than flying?]

[Yes!!]

I hadn't morphed any of my water morphs. This was a first. I mean, yes, on Xarila I had a few water morphs. But this was _Earth's_ ocean. Depths unknown!

[I prefer flying,] Ax commented. [But this is a close second.]

I dived deeper, deeper, deeper!

I felt ecstasy rising in me. I was free! I was the ruler of the ocean! I was the lion prowling on the savannah, I was the bird flying in the sky, I was Xilite!

I flipped my tail and dived deeper!

This was beyond fun!

[Xilite!] Ax snapped suddenly. [Stop!]

I halted immediately. [What?] I said, slightly annoyed.

He swam up beside me. [The Nartec. They live underwater. And I do not know how close we are to them.]

[The Nartec?] I said in amazement. [We monitored them for a while, but finally lost interest. Besides, they're degenerating.]

[Yes,] he said. [Let's turn back.]

I looked down again. [Yeah. I do need air.]

We surfaced, sucking air into our lungs. [Again?] I said hopefully.

[We have plenty of time,] he assured me.

I felt so free, so wild. This ocean! So like mine!

Ocean!

It's hard for another to understand, I'm sure. I mean, most people

would look at me, back away slowly, and call 911.

But the ocean is where I belong.

Xaralites are land creatures. So are humans. But the ocean was so...I don't know, so like me. Or at least so like what I wanted to be.

I remembered the implied meanings of "child of the ocean." I silently thanked my parents for naming me Xilite.

Just the thought of my parents made me want to cry. They'd died when I was young.

Maybe that was what drove me to be a scientist, a warrior, a captain, always pushing my skills to the fullest. Always succeeding. I had done it because I wanted to please them, as they watched from heaven. Xaralites do believe in heaven, hell, and an all-powerful God. At least, most do.

But since my people had been...defeated...I had started to not care. My people were gone. He could have stopped it, and He didn't.

I'd always been taught that He had a purpose in everything. If so...

I pushed those thoughts out of my mind. [Come on!] I laughed.

[Race?] he suggested.

[Where's the finish line?]

[Who cares?]

We both took off at the same time. I pushed my muscles for every tiny bit of speed I could get.

He pulled ahead.

No way! I pushed harder.

Even...even...ahead! Ahead by an inch!

I was winning!

[Just go until you have to surface for air!] I cried. I dived deeper.

He was ahead!

This was fun!

I went deeper!

My lungs started to urge me to surface. I ignored them until Ax spoke. [We must surface.]

[Who won?] I asked as we swam up.

[Who cares?] he repeated with a laugh.

* * *

>Chapter Thirteen -- Xilite<hr>**

My oceanic mood didn't last long. (Yeah, I know "oceanic" doesn't mean "wonderful." Consider who's speaking.) By the time Ax and I flew to the barn, I was back in my warrior mood.

I did think back over the past events. It had been fun hanging out with Ax, and beyond fun swimming in the ocean. But as soon as the moment was over, it seemed to decrease in importance.

Nothing was important except revenge â€œ

I tried to push the thought away. It went against everything I'd been taught. Against Xaralite reasoning, in fact. But no other Xaralites were free, were they?

I showed up at the barn and looked around. Cassie was deliberately not looking at me. I guess my logic of war bothered her.

It would bother any Xaralite as well. I shook that thought from my mind.

I'd always been different. Accepted -- popular among my kind, in fact -- but still the type of Xaralite who stood out. Was it the fact that I was always the leader? Or was it the fact that I'd always been such a warrior?

Rlin had been almost as warrior-like as me. She'd been more reckless than me. More like Rachel than me. I planned things out, decided the best route to attack at, then let myself go wild. She let herself go wild first, let herself go wild second, and let herself go wild third.

I'd had more self-control than many of my playmates, classmates, and later my fellow warriors. The Xaralites didn't understand me. They didn't know what lurked inside me, didn't know my motives, but they saw that my plans worked, and so I'd advanced to a high rank in a short time.

With the Animorphs, if they didn't understand me and know what to expect they didn't care if my plans worked.

Silly sentimentalists. War isn't a popularity game. War is a controlled, do-what-you-have-to-do, whatever-works-best-not-whatever-you-_want_-to-work race for survival.

"Ax," Jake said briefly, nodding. "Xilite. You're late."

"And you have a problem with it?" I said calmly.

He didn't answer. I stepped inside, finding the perfect little spot untouched by the sun. I leaped up on a rail and stood, balancing carefully before I lowered myself down into a sitting position.

"How did it --"

"Jake, I've already had two people ask me. It went fine. He hadn't reported to Visser Three. Any more questions?"

I was snappy. Commanding. Jake looked uncertain.

I sighed. I remembered the ocean and the remembrance gave me strength. I relaxed slightly.

"Didn't he tell a few others, though?" Rachel asked.

I shrugged. "Unimportant to the war. We can take them out."

"We don't take out humans."

"Jake, they are not important."

Cassie sighed. "We already had this conversation, Jake. At lunch."

[You're wrong, Xilite,] Tobias said angrily.

"And the Hork-Bajir?" I said, deathly calm. "You don't care about them."

They hesitated.

"Look, they're your race. I'll abide by your decisions, for now. Note the 'for now.' "

My piercing eyes surveyed them. Cassie looked relieved. Rachel looked undecided. Jake looked surprised. Marco looked suspicious.

Human faces are easy to read.

I could see Tobias. Harder to read him. He seemed to be almost disgusted.

Deal with it, I thought. I didn't say it. _Deal with the reality of war._

What else could be expected? They were just human teenagers.

Of course, I was probably about their age in Xaralite terms. However, Xaralite males can enroll in the military at the Xaralite equivalent of six. Females can enroll at ten.

They made an exception for me.

Xaralites mature quicker than humans, I suppose.

I know any human would think it was insane. But Xaralites are very different from humans.

You're not, a nagging voice said. _You're practically one of them!_

I ignored it. It was wrong. And there is no point in wasting your breath on an argument you know is incorrect to begin with.

* * *

>Chapter Fourteen -- Jake<hr>**

We decided not to kill the humans. Of course. Xilite would merely erase their memories.

It was done quickly. We tracked them and showed up at their houses (in morph). She erased their memories -- both of our visit and of the facts they held.

Then we decided to crash this PTA plan.

"Wonderful. On school campus after hours. We don't --"

"Shut up, Marco," Rachel and Xilite said at the same time.

"Fine. Fine. Fine. But you are aware that if Nora finds out that I left the house to come spy out her classroom, I'll get grounded _and_ get detention?"

"Do we care?" Xilite demanded.

"Probably not," he conceded.

We were in the barn, trying to figure out some way to seal the entrances. Not an easy job. It was agreed that Ax and Xilite would work on the computer, changing the code word and stuff like that, but even then it wouldn't fully accomplish the job. After all, the alarm would only let the Yeerks know that a free human was in the classroom; plus, the Controller would say that he hadn't set it off and they'd know that Andalites had messed with it.

So we had To seal them. Somehow, someway. No clue how.

"I say we just morph elephants and bash the place to bits," Marco said suddenly. We all stared, expecting Rachel to say that instead of him.

"Hey, I've always wanted to destroy the school."

"Yeah, well, so have I," I said. "But I think we can hold out for a better plan. Maybe keeping the Yeerks busy during PTA night. Too busy."

"Too risky," Marco said, instantly serious. "You know how long it would take?"

"I have an idea," Xilite offered. "We're figuring that two Hork-Bajir will be waiting by the classrooms to grab the humans. Right?"

Cassie nodded. "Probably."

"So we morph Hork-Bajir. Morph elephants and destroy one entrance, then post two of us at two classrooms and three at the other."

I considered. "Hmm."

"Not as risky as destroying them all," Marco said, considering. "And if we all had a Dracon or whatever, we could stun the actual Controllers."

"No violence. Hopefully," Cassie added.

"Nice plan," Rachel agreed.

[As long as it doesn't go over two hours,] Tobias said tightly. [All of us have to be present. No way to demorph.]

"Yeah, well, some chances have to be taken," Xilite said a little too harshly.

[How long do these human PTA's normally last?] Ax asked us.

"From like sixteen hours to seventeen hours," Marco muttered.

"Anywhere from one and a half to three," Cassie said somewhat more rationally.

[There will be one extra person,] Ax suggested. [Perhaps he or she could demorph, resume his or her place, and someone else could demorph.]

"Risky," Marco said.

"Is that the only word in your vocabulary?" Xilite said snappishly. "Yeah, it's risky. I don't see why we have to do this whole stupid mission. We are not fighting for individuals. We are fighting to stop the Yeerks. But if we're going to do it, we need a plan, and we don't have anything better."

"You're wrong," Cassie said softly. "We are fighting for individuals."

"Then you need a better reason to fight."

[The human race is composed of individuals. Conscious, hoping, dreaming individuals. We can't forget that. Can't forget why we fight in the greater urge to win. We fight for freedom. We can't push freedom aside, push our cause aside, just because it's not --]

Xilite glared up at Tobias. "We fight to win."

"That's your theory," Marco spat. "And your little army lost."

For a moment a terrible look of loneliness passed over her face. Loneliness beyond comprehension.

Then it vanished, replaced by her arrogant look. "We fought against seven races and three mighty powers. Your little army, Marco, is fighting a single race. Crayak does not interfere. Crayak and Thchi and the Ellimist do not weaken you. In fact, the Ellimist helps you. Your tiny army could not stand against him alone. Your race is so weak that he could wipe you out by merely thinking it. And yet you criticize mine."

She was right. I could see Marco grudgingly accept the fact. I could tell by his expression.

"Perhaps these individuals are who you are fighting for. Perhaps. But if you lose, you will help neither the individual nor the whole."

Xilite softened ever so slightly. "Perhaps...perhaps as long as you do not lose sight of the greater goal...perhaps you are right to fight for individuals. That was my theory, once."

She looked out into the blue sky and sighed.

"Once."

* * *

><p> We sealed off the other entrance. Or at least completely wrecked the computer. Ax and Xilite bombarded it with insane commands until it just shut off.<p>

Back at the barn, waiting until we could do something, we were tense.

"Still don't see why we can't just wreck all of the computers instead," Cassie grumbled.

[Because the Yeerks would concoct a completely different plan. We might not be able to counteract that one so easily. If only one computer is...annihilated...they will probably just abandon it and concentrate on the other entrances,] Ax informed her.

"Ah."

"Okay. Rachel and Cassie at the first entrance. Me, Marco, and Tobias at the second entrance. Ax and Xilite at the third entrance."

"Figuring they'll use the second entrance most?" Marco said, rolling his eyes. "I get all the fun jobs."

Xilite growled deep in her throat. "Coward," she murmured.

Either Marco didn't hear it or he let it go. I suspect that he didn't hear it.

I checked my watch. "Three hours," I reminded them. "Then we meet here. Hopefully in time."

"Yes, oh fearless leader," Marco said sardonically.

"I'll be there early," Xilite volunteered. "If they start moving sooner, I can use the office phone to call Erek on his secure phone line."

I nodded. "Do that. One other person should be here, though."

She looked annoyed. "I don't need backup, Jake."

"Yeah, you do. Your arrogance is always getting the better of you," Marco contradicted.

"I win, too, Marco. I still win."

He snorted and looked away, not knowing how to answer.

I looked from Marco to Xilite. "Don't do anything by yourself, Xilite. And call Ereka if there are any problems."

She smiled sweetly.

I could almost read the message on her face: _Maybe. Maybe not._

Then, as we left, I heard her message in my head.

After commanding an army of Xaralites, after being the captain of a fleet in a war against seven races, you imagine that I would heed your command. She laughed in her telepathic way. _Your arrogance **almost** rivals mine._

* * *

>Chapter Fifteen " Xilite<hr>**

I flew back to the school in my harrier morph. If we were going ahead with this mission, I was going to do it right.

I rode the thermals emanating from the parking lot around the school. No open windows. I sighed in disgust. I couldn't just demorph and break a window and walk in. I had no doubt that the school was being watched by the Yeerks, especially with the big event that night.

It was cold out. The first snow had fallen like a week ago. I knew. I'd practically been buried alive in it.

That had been the only snow of the season. But it was supposed to snow that night, and you could definitely tell by the chill in the air.

I finally dived toward a window. I guessed that I'd fall and die in the street. Or I'd demorph in time. But I was frustrated.

I slashed with my talons. A slight crack appeared.

I threw myself at it and almost lost consciousness. But the glass gave way.

I flapped in and began to demorph.

Now I was cold. Really cold. I stepped out of the classroom and listened.

No sound. Nothing.

I shivered. My black-and-green-swirled leotard was not too warm. Not warm at all, really.

I walked into the classroom I'd be monitoring with Ax later and sat down in one of the desks. Boring. Way boring. Plus, I needed to scope out the place, not just sit in a classroom.

I considered. The risks were high. But the possibilities of usefulness were more extensive than the risks. Besides, I was Xilite and I could handle it.

As began to morph, I saw a dictionary on the teacher's desk. It was open. Open to the "A" section.

My green eyes had landed on the word "arrogance."

Irony. I saw the word "arrogance" just as I decided that I didn't need backup, didn't need caution, didn't need to listen to Jake and do nothing, that I could handle this by myself.

Funny how things work out.

* * *

><p> I had quickly finished my morph. Cat morph. I'd acquired a cat, the same cat whose form Rlin had assumed.<p>

Rlin. I shuddered. Her fate was so...so final.

_No, Xilite, not final. You're still free. And she'll be free, too
â€" one day._

I froze as still as I could and listened. I held my breath. The sound I'd heard was so faint that I feared to move; I felt as though, if I did, I would be unable to hear it again.

Chapman's voice! That was the sound. I raced toward his office, the pads on my delicate feet silencing my steps.

Another voice was evident. "Do this right, Iniss two-two-six. The Visser will be most displeased if you do not."

He shuddered. Shuddered to the marrow of his bones. "Y-yes, Visser Five."

Visser Five's host was Kilan. I saw his face as he exited the office. I melted into the shadows and then raced through the swiftly closing door.

Chapman was still shuddering. Almost shaking with fear.

Coward, I thought, eyeing him with a look of disgust.

He reached out with one shaking hand and punched in a phone number. He lifted the phone, then suddenly remembered that you have to lift the phone _before_ you punch in the numbers. He did so.

"G-get here quickly," he said, fear still evident. "W-w-we n-need to s-start s-sooner than planned."

With my cat hearing, I heard the other person reply. "What's wrong with you?"

"J-just g-get here quickly. Some of the humans h-have already arrived to get good seats," he continued. His voice was growing stronger with every word. His paroxysm of fear was over. I rolled my cat eyes. Such courage.

I needed to get out of the office. Fast.

I needed to demorph, erase his memory of me being there, and get out the door.

He hung up the phone with a slightly less-shaking hand. He lifted his Dracon beam.

Couldn't demorph now! He'd stun me before I could even finish!

I could just meet his eyes now â€" my eyes, my power was still intact â€" but the moment he saw me he'd fire. And I didn't know if it was set to stun or maximum.

I had to get out! Had to warn the other Animorphs!

But I couldn't. I was trapped in the office with a Yeerk, and the door was shut.

I should have listened to Jake and done nothing.

NO! I repulsed the thought. No, no, no! I'd get out of this. I was Xilite. Xilite. Couldn't let myself believe that I'd failed myself.

I'd failed Cairo. Rlin. I'd fail the Animorphs if I couldn't get out of this. But I could not let myself believe that I had failed myself.

You see, that was all that kept me from surrendering to the terrible feeling of failure. From letting it take over me.

I'd failed everyone else.

Just that thought sent emotions boiling up in me.

I would not fail. Not again. Even those humans â€" even the humans that I had argued against â€" I couldn't fail them.

They didn't even know me, true. But right now, I was the only hope that they had.

And I would win. Even if I had to fight by myself, I'd win.

Strangely, the first thing that sprang to mind was the dictionary page.

Arrogance.

But I'd done an extensive study on the English language â€" and a few others, in fact â€" and I'd learned that arrogance did not begin to cover me.

I knew of a better word.

A word that I'd heard Rachel use. A word that I'd looked up, researched " and _liked_.

No, Xilite, you're not a victim of arrogance, I told myself with a laugh. _You're a victim of **hubris**._

* * *

>Chapter Sixteen " Xilite<hr>*

I took a moment to calm my racing heart. I could handle this.

Chapman laughed and stood up, pacing his office. I shrank back into the dark shadows of the office.

"Oh, I'll give them a victory! I'll let them know that I'm not one to be stepped on, to be treated as an inferior! Oh, I'll show them what I can do!"

It was all I could do to keep from laughing. This was the creature who'd been shaking with fear not a full minute ago.

I looked from him to the door, willing him to open it.

There was no other way! He'd stun me, he was still holding the beam, but I'd die " or be unable to demorph " anyway! Nothing to lose!

My eyes glowed from the shadows as I let out a long yowl.

He whirled, bringing the Dracon beam up.

Please, please, please, look at my eyes first, I begged silently.

He did. His eyes met mine and the Dracon beam clattered to the floor.

I almost screamed with delight as he walked over to the door mechanically and opened it. I sprinted out, only pausing a moment to erase his memory.

Okay, Xilite. Find a phone. Call Erek. Go ahead and morph and hold them off for as long as you can.

I was out, free. But I couldn't relax. Relaxation would be fatal " if not to me, then to the humans who were doomed without knowing the danger awaiting them.

I wouldn't let them down.

It took me a moment to realize what I was saying " that I wouldn't let the people down who, less than two hours ago, I'd discarded as unimportant.

What had happened to change my mind?

Perhaps the fact that these humans had as much of a right to be free as...my people?

I sighed and my steps slowed. My people.

Then I was running faster. Faster, faster, faster.

Had to call Erek. Had to alert the Animorphs.

And then, I had to win.

* * *

><p> "Hey, Erek?" I said with a human voice, praying that no one else had happened to pick up the phone. Yeah, the Yeerks couldn't tap the phone line, but anyone could pick up a phone...

"Yes?"

"It's Cat." He knew who I was â€" Xilite â€" but if anyone was listening I was NOT going to let them find my true name out. "Call Jake and tell him that I'm having some problems setting up this new â€" uh â€" bookshelf. I need help." I almost gagged on the words. _Need help?!_ I seriously considered telling him I was fine and that I could handle it.

"Oh, man. Yeah, those bookshelves are heavy. Okay, I'll call him."

He hung up. I set the phone down calmly.

I slid through the hall, trying to find the third classroom. The one Ax and I would handle. I slid with the liquid grace that I still retained, even in human form.

Time to morph.

I considered carefully. What morph? Panther, and just take them all out, or Hork-Bajir and hope that there weren't any Hork-Bajir waiting inside who'd know I wasn't one of them?

Hard choice. But then, I've always been a cat person.

Black fur rippled over me. It shimmered wildly in the lights.

The above-average Xaralites â€" their technical name is _Xarilians_ â€" have the ability to change their fur color in response to emotion or as a warning. This fur covering my human body reminded me of that. Don't ask me why.

For a moment, I was a Xaralite. Kind of. My teeth were sharp, my eyes were Xaralite, my long blond hair (actually, streaked with brown in the transition from blond to black â€" even more like my own) was flowing down my shoulders, my claws were sharp and had replaced my fingernails, my face was streaked with black fur. I paused the morph and an insane idea occurred.

Why not fight like this?

No way. It was insane.

Just then, the first human Controller came in (presumably to check the classroom). He gaped.

"Andalite!" he snapped. A look of confusion passed over his face. "What kind of morph â€œ"

I slashed with my claws retracted. I hit him hard on the side of his face. He fell to the ground, unconscious.

I practically threw him into a closet of some type.

Yeah, I liked this morph.

I opened the window. The Animorphs would need a way in.

Six dots were already visible in the sky.

[Hi,] I said calmly. [The third classroom's window is open. Some other window is open, as well â€œ I broke it to get in. I recommend using this one.]

[What kind of insane morph are you using?] Marco demanded. [It looks like a...a...Xaralite thing!]

[Xaralite thing? They're called "Xaralites." Not "Xaralite things." And I'm halfway morphed to a panther.]

[Why not just use your Xaralite form?] Tobias wondered.

[Because I'm already morphed to this. Now hurry up. Apparently Chapman is starting the stupid infestation thing early. Visser Five was here, bugging him to succeed. I might add that he immediately morphed into a sniveling idiot.]

[I take it you're not using "morphed" in the literal sense?] Rachel asked.

[Uh, no.]

They swooped through the window. I stepped out of the way, locked the door, closed the window, and watched as they demorphed.

"Okay, children, go to your classrooms," Marco said in a teacher-like voice. "Hurry now! You'll be late for class!"

"You're trying to annoy me, aren't you?" I was delighted to find that I could speak in this form. My voice was almost exactly the same as my Xaralite voice.

"Yeah. Is it working?"

"We should use a Yeerk pool entrance that's not being monitored and morph there," Jake pointed out.

"The one with the dead computer," Rachel said immediately. "Morph in that classroom and then spread out."

"Excellent," Cassie agreed. "Let's go."

Rachel sighed with relief. "For a moment, I thought you'd steal my line."

I unlocked the door, peered out, and then crept into the hall. [Yeah, it's clear.]

They followed.

I demorphed as Marco spoke. "Okay, now how do we get past the 'dead' computer?"

"Ax or Xilite, can you fix it?" Jake asked.

[I can,] Ax volunteered. He walked over to the hidden computer embedded in the wall and entered something or other. [Although I believe "unconscious" describes it better than "dead." How does a computer die or lose consciousness?]

"Human metaphors," I said with a shrug.

[Morph now,] he said finally. [Then, Xilite, you'll have to open it.]

I was the only one who could speak the code word without the computer figuring out that I was not a Controller. That meant I'd have to morph last.

I watched impatiently as they morphed. Cassie's was interesting. For some reason, she delayed the blades as long as she could.

I felt a rush of sympathy for her. Unwilling to fight, but unable to decline.

I'd been involved in war since I was the Xaralite equivalent of five. I'd had some chemical in me that had made me a Xarilian. It had made me mature faster than any normal Xaralite. And normal Xaralite (males) can be enrolled at the equivalent of about six.

While it would be ridiculous for a human to fight at the age of five or six, it's somewhat different for Xaralites.

The Xarilian chemical had been a great gift. I'd been a scientist on weapons for a while, then turned my full attention to war. By the time I was the equivalent of fourteen, I was a captain.

By the time I was the equivalent of sixteen or seventeen, the war happened.

I'd had a long, long involvement in war. These Animorphs (other than Ax) had not.

I sympathized with Cassie. But this war was necessary if she wanted the humans to be free.

Not easy, but necessary.

I spoke the code word, then instantly began to morph. I was fast

anyway, and I was hurrying.

The other Animorphs hesitated a moment for me. Then we all stepped through.

[Branch out,] Jake ordered. [And keep in touch by thought-speak.]

I bit back an angry retort of how no one orders me around. I'd been doing that a lot lately. But this war was not for my people. It was for his. So Ax and I walked up to our classroom entrance.

The Hork-Bajir saw us and left. I heard them muttering about how their replacements were finally here.

Good. All was going as planned.

Now to wait. My least favorite activity. Yeah, it's necessary. But it's definitely not fun.

* * *

>Chapter Seventeen â€" Cassie<hr>**

[I wonder how long it will take,] Rachel said in a bored tone.

[Probably not long,] I replied, fingering my Dracon beam. Three of us had gotten one on the way down â€" Jake, Ax, and me. One from each group.

We'd stun the Controllers, stuff them in a closet or whatever, and tell the human to leave. As in, leave the PTA. We'd just have to hope they weren't marked, recorded. If so, they'd be doomed anyway.

I heard a low voice on the other side of the entrance.

[Get ready!] I cried. I raised my Dracon beam.

The door slid open, revealing two humans.

I fired. The Controller fell.

[Leave,] I told the other human. [Go home.]

The human, obviously shocked by the sight of me, left rather quickly.

* * *

><p> There were several visitors to our little entrance before the PTA. Then, after about an hour, I felt a step behind me. I whirled.<p>

Four Hork-Bajir were behind us, blocking us from going down the staircase into the Yeerk pool.

"Well, well, well," a human chuckled. I recognized him as Visser Nine. "Your teammates made quite a mistake. Stunning the future host

and leaving the Controller free to come find us. Tsk, tsk, tsk. Oh well. They may have lost us one host, but they gained us these wonderful Andalite hosts."

I was shocked. Beyond shocked.

They'd found out what we were!

[Jake! Tobias! Marco! Ax! Xilite!] I cried. [Run! Find some way out! They know we're not Controllers!]

[Cassie! We've been captured!]

[Jake?!] I yelled.

[Xilite reporting,] a tense voice said. [Okay, Jake, where are you?]

[Marco, Tobias and I are in cages by the pool!]

[The Hork-Bajir should be heading for you two!] Rachel shouted at Xilite and Ax. [Get moving!]

We were going to be captured. Everything was lost! Everything!

I slashed with a bladed arm and knocked a Hork-Bajir to the ground.

His associates dived for us.

Rachel let loose a Hork-Bajir roar and slashed wildly. She hit one, but more were coming!

Two more Hork-Bajir joined the others!

The newer Hork-Bajir sliced the air with their blades. But not at us!

The Hork-Bajir they hit fell.

[Run, run, run!] Xilite yelled. She raced up, past us, and spoke the code word. The wall opened and we charged through.

[Demorph and remorph!] Ax commanded. [Battle morphs!]

Yeah. We might be temporarily free. But Jake and Marco and Tobias weren't.

* * *

>Chapter Eighteen â€" Xilite<hr>**

I gave the computer the command to remain with the entrance open, then began to demorph, out of sight.

I immediately remorphed. Panther! My midmorph was much like a Xaralite, but it didn't have the grace. The speed of a Xaralite or a panther or even a human.

I sprinted down the stairway and announced my presence.

GROOOOOOOOOOOOWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRRR!

The Controllers gaped. I roared again, louder.

GROOOOOOOOOOOOWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRRR!

[Run away, little Controllers,] I sneered. [Run away!]

The humans scattered, but the Hork-Bajir were advancing. Ax was already fighting, having demorphed. His deadly Andalite tail had already severed several of them.

Cassie and Rachel blew past me, ripping into the Hork-Bajir. The grizzly and wolf did their work well. But more were coming, and they were heading for me.

GROOOOOOOOOOOOWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRRRRR!

The Hork-Bajir shuddered in their tracks. I did not.

I charged! I felt the muscles of the panther rippling as I ran. I reared up on my hind legs and slashed the air, displaying my power for all to see before I brought my claws down on a Hork-Bajir.

Now they were backing away. Some of the braver ones held their ground. Some of the even braver ones advanced.

My Xaralite eyes glowed.

Resist me? **ME?** No, no, no, you will run. Run away! Run as fast as you can and I will not come for you. But run. Run, and may the wind be with you " for if it is not, the grave will!

The Hork-Bajir were all running away now.

One of them paused to unlock the cages occupied by Jake, Marco, and Tobias. Then he ran as well.

They piled out.

But as soon as the other Hork-Bajir turned to run " looked away from me " they regained control. Several of them were already turning back.

[Run!] I cried. [Through the entrance! I programmed it to stay open!]

[Leave you? No way!] Rachel yelled.

[GO! If I'm infested, the Yeerk can't control me! NOW GO!]

[She's right!] Jake said with one of his split-second decisions. [Everyone, out!]

[They'll kill her!]

[No, they'll infest me. Not a problem.]

They finally bolted. I watched them as they ran, then turned and slammed a Hork-Bajir.

Suddenly I felt a new presence. A presence that made the Hork-Bajir leap back.

Visser Three!

[Well, well, well. One lone Andalite.]

I was not afraid of him. But I saw the Hork-Bajir draw back suddenly, almost staggering away before their Visser.

GROOOOOOOOOOWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAARRRR!

He was shocked. [You DARE defy me, Andalite?!] he screamed.

[Yes. I dare defy you, Visser.]

The Visser was morphing. Morphing quickly. It looked dangerous.

The Luminar. I'd seen the creature before, heard of it. I'd been taught about it.

He struck!

Fire! Fire, all around! Everywhere! The flames...the flames...

It was spreading over my body!

I was dying. Only some combination of the panther's strength and the Xaralite strength had kept me alive this long...

Couldn't think. Couldn't breathe.

Couldn't breathe.

Couldn't...

I was passing out. My body was a charred wreck. The panther's natural black was streaked with an unnatural black.

And all I could see as I lay dying was one word, etched on a dictionary page.

Arrogance.

* * *

>Chapter Nineteen â€" Xilite<hr>**

I leaped to my feet. Where was I? Where was I?!

A cruel, twisted laugh echoed in my head, along with the words, [Well, well, well.]

I snapped my head up to see the Visser. He was laughing. He was amused.

I was not.

It all came back to me after those first few seconds. How I'd morphed a panther. How the others had escaped, how the Visser had tried to incinerate me.

I looked down and gasped. I almost fell over in shock.

I was a Xaralite!

My mind raced. How had I...

Ever since I'd become human, I'd been unable to resume Xaralite form. It was understandable that I'd be a Xaralite on the planet Thchi took me to. But other than that, I hadn't been a Xaralite in about four years!

The other Animorphs â€" even Ax â€" had no clue about it. I had never told any of them that I was unable to become a Xaralite. When Marco asked why I wasn't a Xaralite instead of some midmorphed panther, I hadn't told him the whole truth.

But now I was...me.

How? How could I be Xilite?

I felt a rush of power. Yes, I was Xilite now. Completely.

He stared at me. [What is this strange body? I'm afraid I've never heard of such a creature.]

I sneered. "You have," I said in a strong, clear voice. "You may not remember it, but you have, Visser. You have even heard of me, personally. But I'm sure they wouldn't let you remember."

I would not back away. I could run, I was sure, but I would not retreat.

I would be killed. But I would die Xilite.

There was no sound in the Yeerk pool except flames crackling. The Luminar's heavy breathing. Even the few hosts in their cages were still, watching this strange creature and the Visser face each other.

[Well. I suppose that we'll infest you, then, and find out your secrets from you.]

I laughed. I laughed as defiantly as I could (extremely defiantly), as loudly as I could. The Visser's face contorted in what I assumed was rage, by Luminar standards.

"You imagine that you could infest me?" I said, all laughter stopping suddenly. "You imagine that you could infest a Xaralite?"

[Perhaps not, from your arrogant words. Perhaps you'll be an excellent challenge for my Hork-Bajir.]

Suddenly, thirty Hork-Bajir leaped forward and dived for me.

I spun to the right and they flew past as a mighty wave. I danced around the edge of the pool and watched them try to catch up with me.

I ran backwards, keeping my eyes on them as they raced. As fast as Hork-Bajir are, Xaralites are so much faster.

Did the Yeerks recognize me? Did they recognize me, their old enemy? The Xaralite whose race they had doomed? Did they, even now, know who they chased?

I spun back around to run.

I saw a Hork-Bajir blade looming above me and spun away. It sliced the air not an inch away.

I twisted away as he brought it down where I had been. I slashed with my Xaralite claws and decapitated him. But it had taken long enough for the other Hork-Bajir to catch up.

He'd given his life and perhaps won the battle against me. I admired that.

Note: There is a difference between "admire" and "appreciate."

I bolted, turning at opportune times to strike at the leaders.

Suddenly, I was on the floor. I was staring up at a blade that was arching downwards "€"

FWAPPP!

CLANG!

The blade stopped in midair not six inches from my face. The other blade quivered with energy.

The Andalite tail blade.

[I thought that you might need some assistance,] Ax said calmly.

[Thank you,] I replied, leaping to my feet. The lead Hork-Bajir, the ones facing us, shrank a little bit before the "Xaralite" and the Andalite. The ones behind them stood calmly, waiting. The group behind them "€" the ones farthest away from us, it might be noted "€" were roaring defiantly and slashing the air with bladed arms, trying to impress their strength and bravery into us. Me, I wondered if they'd be quite so strong and brave if they were at the front of the potential battle.

The Visser stepped in front of us. [Well, well, well. Perhaps this strange creature cannot be infested, but I am sure that the Andalite

can.]

I felt a shiver of fear run through me " for him. But then, he could resist a Xaralite, couldn't he resist a...

Right then, I figured it out. Of course! He had been able to resist me because I'd tried to xilinnize him once as I (a human at the time) would another human. That had no affect on him, but did help him prepare for another blow. I tried again, as I would an Andalite. But because I was only a human and because I had already tried (and failed) he was partially immune. After several more times, he was ready for any form of the xilinni power " such as what had happened on that strange planet.

However, a Yeerk would be a different story.

We faced, all sides quivering with energy. The Hork-Bajir, the Visser vs. a Xaralite and an Andalite.

The worst of it? The Visser was between me and the Hork-Bajir. So I couldn't xilinnize them.

A Hork-Bajir advanced a step or so. The Visser broke the tense silence by turning to incinerate him.

His charred ashes remained on the ground.

GROOOOOOOOWAAAAAAR!

The Xaralite roar exploded from my throat as the Hork-Bajir behind me cut deep.

FWAAPP! Ax's tail cracked through the air and hit the Hork-Bajir hard. He fell, severed in two.

I couldn't move my body. No, that wasn't true. I could barely move my legs.

Not enough to run, to escape. But then, I never backed down.

[Xilite!] Ax yelled. [Get up!]

There was a healthy bit of fear in his voice.

[Ax...I can't.]

[What?!]

[Paralyzed. Slight ability for movement in my legs. I don't know how much. I can "]

The Visser laughed. [Is this foreign creature quite hurt?] he taunted. [Are you unable to move? Did my lone Hork-Bajir do his job well?]

[No filthy Yeerk could do any better,] I said calmly. [A pity it's all for nothing.]

The first streaks of a panther were appearing on my skin already. I

could feel strength fully returning to my legs.

[Ah-ah-ah,] the Visser laughed. He turned slightly to face Ax. [If you morph, he dies.]

I froze.

[Death better than being a host,] Ax told me in private thought-speak. [Do it.]

[No.]

The Visser glared at me. [The idea of his death appeals to me, in fact.]

He breathed.

Time seemed to freeze as his fiery breath filled the air.

[Nooo!] I screamed. I threw myself through the air.

Flames! Flames covering me!

I activated a gland in my Xaralite body. My fur moistened, putting out the fire...

Way too late.

My body was a seared, scorched, charred wreck.

Ax leaped up. Not burned.

[Xilite, what...]

I lost consciousness too soon to hear his next words.

* * *

>Chapter Twenty â€" Ax<hr>**

I was put into a box. A Ramonite box. I'd been in one before.

Xilite's burnt form was on the ground beside me. Unconscious or dead, I couldn't tell which.

I was to be infested in only a few minutes.

She was still. Her form was lifeless, motionless. Her green eyes were covered by her eyelids. Her hands were limp and her claws were retracted, as I discovered.

I lifted her hand into mine. [Xilite.]

She did not move. I could not tell if she was breathing.

[Xilite!] Louder.

Nothing!

Panic began to rush through my system. I struggled to regain control.
[Xilite, please.]

She moaned slightly. She was alive, then. For how long?

I held my breath, waiting for some sign of movement. None came. The hand that I still held did not move at all. Her form was so silent and still. A hushed air seemed to fill her, as though all was quiet and all would ever be quiet.

[Xilite, wake up, I love you,] I whispered.

Motionless.

Dead or unconscious? I asked myself. I could not see her chest heave with breath. I could not feel a pulse in her Xaralite hand.

Ax.

I snapped my head up.

[Xilite! Are you...]

Don't worry. It's...it's my time, I suppose. I wouldn't have enough strength to morph even if I was conscious.

[You are conscious.]

No...no I'm not. I don't know how I can be unconscious and still be saying this. But I can't move my body, not my eyes or my legs or my mouth or my arms. It's more than paralysis, Ax.

[You're wrong!] I cried desperately.

I'm sorry, she whispered in her telepathic goodbye. _I...I just want you to know that..._

I grasped her hand tighter, even though I knew she couldn't feel it.
[I love you,] I said softly. [And I'll miss you so much...]

Thank you for everything. For showing me that not all Andalites are the same. For the battles on that planet. For not telling the others what I am...what I was. For keeping my secrets. I'm sorry it had to end this way. I'm almost dead and you're doomed to be a Controller.
I heard a sob creep into her telepathic voice. _Ax, I'm so sorry...this is my fault..._

[No, Xilite. I didn't have to come here. And I'll die before I'll become a Controller. Rather say that we are both...]

I'm so sorry.

There was a still silence for a moment. I suddenly felt her Xaralite body shudder.

[Xilite!]

I love you, Ax...

Then she vanished.

* * *

>Chapter Twenty-one â€" Xilite<hr>**

I had lost control of my body. I was feeling death descending, for the second time that day.

Suddenly I heard a voice in my head.

Her voice.

Hello, Xilite.

I opened my eyes quite suddenly. I was a Xaralite, still. Not burned. Alive.

"You," I said calmly, standing up with all the grace of my species.

Calm, Xilite. Don't die angry, letting her know that she's gotten to you. Don't let her know what a wreck she's made of your life. Don't let the helpless despair show on your face. Die calm. Die the captain of the Xaralite fleet, not the human.

I kept my face calm and my eyes calm as she spoke.

You're not quite dead yet. You've lost the bridge between your body and your mind, but you're not dead. Not yet.

"I am aware of the fact," I said, still calm.

Once you die, I can do nothing.

"Then hasten my death."

You don't understand. I wish to help you.

"Accept help from you? Never."

Still calm. Still impenetrable. I saw anger cross her snake face, then it was expressionless. *I can restore your...wounds...and give you a burst of transportation energy so that you can escape. You will be â€"*

"And the catch? Oh, there's always a catch with you. And I believe that I will accept my fate as it is."

And leave the Andalite?

For just a moment, my calm impenetrability faded. I tried to pull it back over my face. "Aximili?"

You shouldn't be so formal, Xilite. After all, you love him, riiiiiiiiight?

I would not have thought that even Thchi could stoop to that silly

human stunt. "Yes."

She hesitated, as a human schoolgirl would who expects to find her opponent crying and instead finds her unaffected. *You would leave him there? Such love.*

I seethed with rage. I couldn't accept help from this vile creature.

He will be infested. Infested, his greatest nightmare. Infested by the Yeerks, the species who killed his brother. He will meet with a fate so much worse than death in his eyes, and why? Because you are too proud to accept help.

I shuddered. She wasn't lying. If only she was...

My brain flashed back to the time when Kaschilia (one of my warriors) had suggested asking help from the Chee. I'd said no immediately. Why? Because of arrogance. Pride.

You failed your race. Will you fail him as well?

"There is a catch," I said, trying to remain calm but beginning to fail.

No, no, no. A catch? Why would I have a catch?

"You lie," I stated. I growled deep in my throat, mulling over her response. Thchi was not bound by the rules of Crayak and the Ellimist. Not really.

She could lie. She could say that there was no catch when there was. She could trick me. And, in the midst of this, she could use my emotions against me.

She could tell me the truth.

She could tell me that Ax would be infested and be lying. But I knew
â€" I knew â€" that it was the truth.

I passed my clawed hand over my forehead, claws facing outward. My mind, that logical part of me, argued that it was better to die than accept her help. Better to die a warrior than live in her shadow.

But Ax...infested...the Animorphs killed or the same...

The last hope for my people extinguished...

Ax...

I straightened. "For Ax," I said coldly.

* * *

><p> Suddenly I was back at the Yeerk pool. I felt new power surging through me. The power to travel from place to place by merely thinking it.<p>

I looked around, searching for Ax.

[Bring the Andalite,] the Visser snapped, once again in his Andalite form. Five big Hork-Bajir headed over to the wall.

One slammed a panel with his fist. The wall opened, revealing a hole that was actually a box. I could see blood on the floor.

My blood.

Ax slashed the air with his tail blade. The Hork-Bajir who'd hit the panel fell. His head fell a half-second later.

The Hork-Bajir edged backwards slightly, then attacked.

Just then the Visser spotted me.

[Another of the strange creatures!] he said with delight.

"Not another of them, Visser," I said calmly. "I am the same."

His face contorted in rage and hate and confusion.

No time for him. The Hork-Bajir were closing in fast, and more were joining.

[Ax!] I cried in thought-speak.

He hesitated just a moment, then sliced a Hork-Bajir in two.
[Xilite?!]

[No time to explain,] I said, fighting my way through the Hork-Bajir crowd.

[You're alive!]

[Yeah, well, I don't really know if that's going to last. For all I know I could drop dead in the next five seconds,] I muttered. [But yes, I'm alive. For now.]

A Hork-Bajir hit me hard. I started to fall and felt Ax catch my arm.

Woods, I thought. _Woods behind Cassie's house._

Quite suddenly, we were there.

I heard a great laugh echoing in my head. A cruel, gleeful, twisted laugh. It reminded me of Visser Three's laugh. Reminded me of...Thchi...

Fear gripped me. It raced through my body, flooded me. Adrenalin pumped through my system.

Not a fight. Not if I was right and there was a catch. There would be no fight.

After all, I was powerless against her.

My doubts, my fear seemed to evaporate as I saw him beside me. I turned to face him and suddenly realized just how glad I was to be

alive.

I threw myself into his arms, fighting back sobs.

[You're alive,] he whispered. [How...]

Alive, yes. Free, no.

"Thchi!"

You really believed that there was no catch? Or were you just blinded by your love of that foolish Andalite? You truly believed that I would let such a perfect opportunity go by?

The fear was flooding me again.

Flooding _me_.

Xilite.

[What is she talking about?] Ax demanded.

Don't die with this fear racing through you, I pleaded with myself.
Don't die like this.

But no, of course I wouldn't die. That wasn't what she wanted from me.

She wanted me to join her.

"No," I whispered. "No, no, no, no, no."

[Xilite, what is she talking about?!]

I felt myself slipping away. For good, this time. I was evaporating into thin air.

No. I'd almost died twice today, and I'd escaped. There had to be a way out now!

Desperation filled me. No. Death would be better!

No!

[Xilite!]

"I have to go," I said softly. I couldn't reveal this terror. Not even to him, because Thchi would see.

[What is going on?!] Fear showed on his face. Fear for me. His grip on my now-evaporating hand tightened.

"Goodbye," I murmured. I could no longer feel his hand. Could no longer feel my own body.

Then I was gone.

Doomed to be her slave for eternity.

My people. I failed you.

End
file.